

Understanding Culture, Society and Politics

Quarter 1 – Module 3: Cultural Relativism and Ethnocentrism



What is It

In this part of your journey, we provide something for you to deepen your understanding about culture.

Please continue reading with comprehension as you discover further knowledge that will help you out in your quest on the remaining phases of this lesson.

What is Ethnocentrism?

Ethnocentrism is a belief that one's own culture is better than others. They tend to compare, evaluate, and even judge other people's ways based on the values and standards set in one's own culture. Their worldview is based on the beliefs, assumptions, expectations, and values shaped by one's language, behavior, customs, values, religions and other aspects.

Due to ethnocentric beliefs, many people are blinded from seeing things in another perspective. Ethnocentric people tend to dislike or make false judgment on other cultures. They tend becoming biased and judge another culture as bad and wrong.

Even though we deny it, most of us are ethnocentric at some point in our lives. Some do not even realize that they are being ethnocentric at that moment. Below are some of the examples of ethnocentrism:

- a. The American society sees themselves as a world leader. As a result, they interfere in the political affairs of other countries and try to control them, leading to misunderstanding and miscommunication amongst nations which sometimes result to war.
- b. During the time of Adolf Hitler, Germans believed that they are a superior race. This led to the death of 6 million Jews whom they considered as an inferior race.
- c. European countries go beyond their ethnocentric biases and saw non-European cultures as uncivilized and underdeveloped countries of savages and barbarians. They used this perspective to justify colonialism and imperialism.
- d. Cases of hate crimes and terrorism violence can usually be traced back to religious conflicts and misunderstandings.

Cultural Relativism as the Opposite View

Cultural relativism is a belief that cultures are equally complex. There is no such thing as superior or inferior culture.

Cultural relativism is very important in studying the culture of other people. It is a way of viewing the beliefs, values, and practices of a culture from its own

viewpoint. Another way to say this is that others should understand an individual's beliefs and activities in terms of that person's own culture.

- Cultural relativism promotes greater appreciation of the cultures that an individual might encounter along the way.
- Cultural relativism is a good way to rehearse the norms and values of a society --- a requirement that one must subscribe to, regardless of his/her cultural origin.
- It means that the function and meaning of a trait are relative to its cultural setting.

To understand better the main difference between ethnocentrism and cultural relativism, an illustration was provided below:

Hello, I am Ben. I am an ethnocentric. I always believe that my culture is superior from others. I often use my own culture to judge others. I consider their beliefs and practices as savage or corrupt. Most of the time I tend to discriminate others, bully them for their practices, and get into conflict with them.



Hello, I am Lisa. I am a cultural relativist. I believe that culture of people must be looked at in terms of the world these people inhabit. I try to look at their culture based on what their practices bring in to them. If Eskimos kill their infant sometimes, I believe that there is a practical reason why they do that. That is why for me, culture is relative. There is no right or wrong, and I don't have the right to say if it is good or bad.

